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HOW CUBANS DIFFER FROM US.

BY LIEUTENANT-COLONEL R. L. BULLARD, U.S.A.

AMERICA is face to face with a still unsolved Cuban problem. To know Cubans, therefore, and how they differ from us is now a thing of moment. In the wretched mess which we have made in handling our negro problem, we have warning against the policy of proceeding in ignorance, though we do it with intentions that would honor the angels.

Shall it be with us in Cuba, "The measure of your absurdity is your difference from me?" Since Cuba and the Philippines have pulled us out of our shell, Americans are broadening. We are beginning to be able to note, without pity or contempt, that all men are not even such as we.

To the eye of the observer, upon his first coming to Cuba, the differences between Cubans and Americans rise countless and loom enormous; but, upon acquaintance, many of the differences which at first sight appear so striking and vivid, strangely fade, and others completely disappear and are forgotten. These are mere surface differences of no consequence. But there are others that remain or come to light on after contact. These concern us.

Cuba is at our doors, has always been, but till now we have not noted her. Four hundred years ago she was discovered by Spain, only yesterday by America. Fresh from our shores entering her gates, we gaze at Morro and Cabañas castles on the left and La Punta, La Fuerza and Habana on the right, and feel that we are entering a new world. In the massive stones and frowning walls of her old forts, we see something of Rome, the Eternal; in their dungeons, dark passages, great ditches, towers, drawbridges and ponderous doors, the Middle Ages; in the narrow, tortuous streets, the heavy, unadorned, prison-like walls and enclosures we see the East—we think of the ancient cities of Asia Minor and of Egypt.

In the swarthy men and dark-haired, dark-eyed women, there is something of Northern Africa, and our thoughts turn back to the wonderful, dark Moor who long ruled Spain and left her his blood, aye, and much, too, of his character and ways, for all generations. It is new, it is different. Everything, the ships alone excepted, somehow suggests antiquity and the reverence of history, and—a past, of which America has none.

At the landing and throughout Cuba, there looms the great sign of equality between white man and black. To the American at home, the negro as a social, political or even industrial equal is an affront, an offence, nothing less; to the Cuban he is not. We resent him; the Cuban does not. We will not accept him; the Cuban does. To the Spaniard, from whom the Cuban sprang, the negro was never a *persona non grata*. In the colonies of Spain the two have ever easily mixed and crossed. In Cuba it was and is so. Schools, churches, theatres, hotels, baths, street-cars, steamers—all are the black man's and white man's alike.

Between the black and white, all over Cuba, one can but be struck with the gentler, more kindly, more considerate relations and feelings. One cannot fail to see quickly that the Cuban negro is unmistakably a milder and a gentler being than his American brother. For this there is but one explanation. It is to be found in his only really differing conditions, namely, his difference of status and treatment. It is because in Cuba the negro is politically, industrially and almost socially, in public and in private, accepted as an equal. It is because he is not everywhere confronted and made hard in thought and feeling by cold or resentful signs of contempt from the white man. There seems no way to avoid this conclusion. This thought, when we recur to the hardness and bickerings between the races with us, brings feelings of shame and regret. We think to mend the conditions; we feel that we would be willing to do much, to go far, to translate these gentler feelings to soften and better our own country; but in this thinking we are at last and unavoidably confronted and stopped by the true and only cause of these gentler feelings in Cuba—the mixture of races. From America to Cuba we can pass in hours; from the American view to the Cuban view herein, not in all time. Some have jeered the fear of a negroid race. Let them visit eastern Cuba. It is too late to fear; we must there face it.

"Naw, I ain't no Cuban," gloweringly answered me a Cuban-looking American whom I had asked as to his nationality. "No, sir, I have not the honor," answered me an American-looking Cuban to whom I had put a like question. The two answers illustrate a wide-yawning national difference. Politeness, a delightful readiness to please, is among the Cuban's most marked and pleasing characteristics. These are his everywhere and under all conditions. Consideration for the stranger is no less strong and characteristic. If you but inquire your way, the busiest Cuban in town or country will not only stop his work to tell you in full, but you can only with difficulty in most cases prevent him from coming with you to show you the whole road. Their affability and responsiveness are delightful. In the parks and cafés, in public, you need but speak to them. Travelling, everywhere, whether acquainted or not, they entertain each other, chatting pleasantly in groups, where Americans would be found glum, silent and alone. It may make them lose time, it may not let them go so fast or do so much—it has that effect—but it has another. It makes life easier and sweeter and pleasanter.

The Cuban imprisons his wife. Once married, it is for her the home, barred door and grated window. It is the Moor.

A remarkable strength and exuberance of feeling go with the Cuban's blood. His language alone, his tongue, is all inadequate to express his feelings. He talks with arms, hands, face and shoulders, with all his body. All passion is excessive, swelling, boundless. Perhaps it is the climate; one cannot say. Yet the self-contained American is at once the envy and the despair of Cubans. They are, and they know it without being able to amend it, over-emotional and over-excitible. The common cry of the newsboy makes every issue a thrilling extra, and you buy it to find—nothing. Wild cries startle you in the streets. With heart in your throat and expecting a scene of horror, an accident or a fearful runaway, you turn to find a driver halting in perfect control a sleepy mule that looks as if he had never been guilty of a quick movement in all his life. Hysterical public justice to-day imposes upon crime a severe punishment, none of which an equally hysterical public sympathy will, to-morrow, permit to be executed. It is a nation of vehement emotion, of vehement lovers, haters, actors and orators. If repressed, if obliged to contain themselves even a little, they explode. Right here, remembering the force and

repression that everywhere characterize governments of Roman-Spanish derivation, we find explanation, in large part, of Cuban revolutions in the past. That government alone can succeed with them that can provide, and with strength and equanimity allow, the daily use of a vent to their feelings. Let them storm, let them rant, let them rave; it is the safety valve.

There are certain differences which, though they early and everywhere attract our notice and call forth contemptuous criticism, are yet not strictly Cuban, but depend also upon the climate. Prime among these is the "mañana habit," procrastination. It is nothing less than a yearning to let things go, a willingness to rest on forever, to "sit around" humped in the shoulders and doubled in the chest, unmoved alike by sense of duty or natural inclination either to work or to think. Not the white man nor any man was made to work in Cuba at the American's straining rate. It is impossible. In colonial days it was attempted with the Cuban Indians. It killed them; the race was wiped out.

But if it is impossible, neither is it necessary for men to work so hard in Cuba. The Lord provides; He does it almost all.

In that gentle climate, too, after hours of complete inactivity, the body makes no demand upon us for that physical exercise upon lack of which elsewhere quickly follow ill-feeling and physical discomfort. Unprompted by the body, the mind also soon ceases to suggest the need of exercise. We live on, easily, deliciously and without care.

Cubans, again, are moved with no such anxiety as we for wealth, no impatience to get at and exploit at once and to the bottom the last resources of the land. Unlike us, they take time to eat; they do not hustle, shove or glare fiercely at you in the streets if you do not get out of their way.

But the non-rushing habit is not solely of the climate. They like the world's goods, but neither Cuban nor Spaniard has ever felt that possession is the main thing in life nor been willing to make the fierce struggle we make for money. Nor, having it, does he so value it. For anything he desires, if he have the money, he stops at no price; he buys it. To the American this way does not appeal. To him it is all but incomprehensible that a man will not put forth the last effort to acquire and pile up all wealth. This is his main subject of carping in Cuba. It is his point of least patience and last condemnation of the Cuban.

Close kin to this relaxation in physical and industrial is a certain relaxation in moral qualities. This will be denied, most by those who, longest in Cuba, have had most opportunity to judge and most opportunity—to fall into the same way.

The amount of government which Cuba carries and seems willing to carry is astonishing. All the relations of ordinary life, down to the minutest details, are regulated and hedged about by laws and watched by officers. In town or country, police and rural-guard uniforms are never out of one's sight, and the number of civic officials, public functionaries, secretaries and clerks seems endless. At least every tenth man is some sort of an officer. And yet in the general desire to hold public office (the last revolution was but a struggle for the offices), the people would perhaps be willing to see the number doubled.

Next to the amount of government they will stand comes the amount of taxation to which they will submit. In America, the politician's surest bid for popularity, his winning card, is the cry of "high taxes." In Cuba, where, from high duties, we may say it costs even to breathe, that cry is hardly heard.

From the long tutelage of so much law and government, the Cubans, in spite of their impulsive, revolutionary nature, have emerged a people with an awe of authority and a fear of the law unknown among Americans. "Guns" are as thick to-day in Cuba as in the West in her palmiest days; their deadly use is of the rarest occurrence.

The laws' close supervision, too, has worked some curious results. It has been so hard upon the use of force, even in self-defence, that this right in any adequate sense has been practically wiped out of Cuban law. The thief and the burglar, even when caught in the act, have been made safe from personal harm, and the officer of the law almost disabled in any arrest where he meets the least resistance. A rural guard was fired upon by a thief whom he was pursuing. He returned the fire, wounding and capturing his man. The thief got six months, the guard three years.

Rank and officialdom command an exaggerated deference, an obsequiousness even far outside the range of their authority. Be one but an officer, one can do anything, command anything. That it be known that one exceeds his authority, in general makes little difference if one but have a little rank. The influence of the official is so wonderful that his personal wishes and desires are

likely to be met even without motion on his part. This often makes the lower officers the mere toadies of the higher. "Make us," said a keen-observing Cuban, speaking of the present American intervention, "make us officers that will act independently, and you will have put Cuba on her feet."

This quality of obsequiousness is, further, the basis of caciqueism, the Cuban habit or tendency to refer and to defer in all things to some local leader. The cacique it was that in a few years split up into some twenty-four insignificant, wrangling boroughs the half-dozen provinces that once composed a single colony of Spain in South America. But, fortunately, he is slowly disappearing in Cuba.

"The worst and most general public graft in the world," we often hear charged by Americans upon Cubans. No, it is only that, from lack of experienced practice, it is crudely done, so crudely as to make it easily discoverable and more offensive.

A basic difference that accounts for much that we criticise in Cuban character, personality, government, politics and public life, that accounts for much of deficiency, much of weakness, is the fault of the Cuban's raising and training his children from birth to manhood to know not discipline—to know not what it is to restrain one's desires, control one's self, or deny one's inclinations if their satisfaction is attainable. It is the lack of this training that makes the difference between a child and a man, not in body, but in character. It is that which makes the full-grown savage, when denied his will, throw himself down like a little child to weep and cry before you in abandon of disappointment and anger. It is because of the lack of that which the Cuban is not taught, that, with the body of a man, he appears so much in the character of a child. This accounts for the Cuban emotionality and impracticability, their excitability and anger when opposed in any way, their wild rushing into revolutions when everything does not go to suit them, their lack of poise in government and public affairs. It makes them want to gratify every whim or desire; it takes from them the power of self-denial. It makes them ready to pay any price in money or anything else, except self-control, for whatever they desire. It keeps them children. It makes it necessary for a neighbor to take them in hand, control, direct and manage their government and public polity. It makes the Cuban a Cuban.

R. L. BULLARD.